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ABSTRACT

This paper differentiates between student teaching, beginning teacher induction, and internship programs by defining an intern as "an uncertified teacher on a limited contract with reduced teaching responsibilities and increased supervision and support." Recent literature dealing with induction programs is examined briefly and a model internship program in operation at New Mexico Highlands University is described. The distinguishing characteristics of the model are that it is a flexible, site-initiated program for undergraduate students and that it works in close cooperation with school districts. Internships are provided both for in-place district personnel and the university's resident undergraduate students. Factors to be considered in arranging appropriate sites include: the teaching situation; availability of mentors; orientation procedures; supervision; on-site training; and contract terms. Program benefits to interns, school districts, and state departments of education are discussed. (JD)

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TEACHING INTERNSHIPS:

A FLEXIBLE SOLUTION FOR EMERGING PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

The paper distinguishes between three common uses of the term "intern" and defines its concern as *uncertified teachers on limited contracts with reduced teaching loads and responsibilities,* rather than with student teachers or beginning teachers in an induction program. Recent literature dealing with induction programs is examined briefly. A model internship program in operation at New Mexico Highlands University is described. Distinguishing characteristics of the model are that it is a *flexible, site-initiated program for undergraduate students.*

An overview of the program's development is given; it is an outgrowth of activities begun in a Teacher Corps project. Internships are provided both for in-place district personnel and the university's undergraduate students. Factors considered in arranging appropriate sites include: the teaching situation; availability of mentors; orientation procedures; supervision; on-site training; and contract terms. Program benefits to interns, school districts, and state departments of education are discussed.

I would like to start by establishing a working definition of the term *internship* for our discussion today. This is a necessary initial step because the word has been used at least three distinct ways in recent literature. First, it has been used as a replacement for *student teaching*. I'm not sure why this has happened, but I suspect it is an outgrowth of concern over ongoing problems with the way people enter the profession. As such, it seems a purely cosmetic device -- old wine in new bottles -- and is not really our focus today.

Second, the term has been used to refer to teachers who are participating in an *induction program* with their districts. These inductees are typically beginning teachers for whom systematic and sustained assistance has been arranged to facilitate the transition to their professional roles. Such programs have received a good deal of attention and support in recent years. In 1985, NCATE recommended an induction period for beginning teachers[1]; this was echoed a year later by the Holmes Group[2] and the Carnegie Forum[3]. Also that year, an issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education* was concentrated on the topic[4].

In addition, the Association of Teacher Educators has also made a number of strong recommendations for teacher induction programs, saying:

1. that induction programs are necessary in every school district;

2. that induction programs must be based on the needs of individual beginning teachers;

3. that the experienced professionals who serve as sources of help should receive training and support in their new roles, including the reduction of teaching loads;

4. that the support role and the evaluation role should be separated; and

5. that such programs should involve districts, universities, and state departments of education in an ongoing staff development effort[5].

Induction programs have a number of important goals. They can help beginning teachers improve their skills. They can also increase the retention of beginning teachers -- a serious problem when it is estimated that nearly 30% of teachers leave the field in their first two years[6]. Finally, induction programs are seen as a way to help ensure the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers as they take on highly stressful experiences. Preliminary research is indicating that a number of induction programs around the country are meeting these goals[7]. So these are very valuable programs which should be encouraged. Nevertheless, that is not what I mean by *internships* either.

What I mean by internships is something in between a typical student teaching experience and an induction program. I define an intern as an uncertified teacher on a limited contract with reduced teaching responsibilities and increased supervision and support. There are a number of models for such programs around the country; among the best known are the Master of Arts in

Teaching Program at the University of Pittsburgh[8] and the Lyndhurst Fellowship Program at Memphis State University[9]. The Pittsburgh program is a fifth year program for students with Bachelor degrees; the Memphis model is a fifteen month program for graduate students. In our state, both the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University run post-baccalaureate programs featuring extensive cooperation with local school districts. All of these programs have been described adequately in the literature, whereas our program, which differs from them in a number of ways, has not. Our model, in contrast, is a *flexible, site-initiated program for undergraduate students.*

To begin at the beginning: the internship program at New Mexico Highlands University is an outgrowth of our involvement with the Teacher Corps program a number of years ago. In our Teachers Corps program we had a number of students who obtained Associate of Arts degrees and were hired to work as instructional aides in local school districts. Many of them continued over the years to take courses at night and during the summer, and eventually there were several who had completed, except for student teaching, all the requirements both for a B.A. and for initial licensure. Being intimately familiar with Northern New Mexico politics, many of these individuals were reluctant to give up their aide positions in order to complete student teaching. Not only would they suffer a loss of income for a semester, they might also find that their

jobs had vanished or been given to someone else. In addition, they had often served as aides for up to fifteen years and were used to being entrusted with significant instructional responsibilities; therefore, a typical student teaching assignment seemed inappropriate.

The University agreed to arrange *internships* for these individuals which would allow them to remain as district employees, to expand their responsibilities in specified ways, and to permit both extensive supervision and reflective opportunities. We were quite pleased with the results of these arrangements and are happy to report that we have seen nearly all of the eligible students complete their programs. Last year, one moved into a full-time assignment as a teacher with her school district.

Along the way an interesting thing happened. Districts began to ask us, "What *is* this internship program?" When we described it, they said, "Oh, that's too bad. We thought it was something else." Somewhere along the line it seems we finally asked the right question: *"What would you like it to be?"* Their responses fell in two categories. First, a few districts, usually in isolated rural areas, had teachers on emergency certificates; these individuals typically had Bachelor degrees and had completed all educational courses except student teaching. No university in the state offered student teaching during the summer; and no one wanted a student teacher who hadn't started out in their own program anyway. These districts had recruiting problems to start with and now they were

going to lose someone they wanted to keep. Could we help?

We decided we could. Highlands University agreed to accept existing course work for these in-place teachers and to arrange internships as if they were our own students. If you've ever worked with a university, you know what a sacrifice that entails. It means assuming other universities do their job as well as you do; it means assuming local school people know a good teacher when they see one; it even means sacrificing some FTE -- such thoughts are repugnant to universities, but we went ahead anyway. A number of students have completed this program: they have found their internships useful; the districts are pleased to have certified teachers; and the State Department of Education is happy not be dealing with waiver situations in these cases.

The more usual thing that districts asked for were unique people to meet unique circumstances. "Did we know anyone who might serve as a part-time music teacher for a rural district?" "Did we have any students who were mature enough to be the second teacher in a growing special education program?" "Did we know anyone who might work with Spanish-speaking children in Omaha?" Actually, we did. You may have noticed that the average age of college students has risen dramatically over the last decade. Our typical undergraduate is an English-Spanish bilingual woman in her late 20's. Many of them are ready to move into positions of significantly higher responsibilities than were student

teachers only a decade ago. As an institution, Highlands University has decided to make that possible where it can. Most of our interns, as you might imagine, have been placed within our service region; however, we have also placed them from Nebraska to California.

These internships are arranged in two ways. Usually, a district will call us about a situation and ask for help. Because we are a small university, we can't always accommodate the requests, but when possible we will recommend students to them. Districts are responsible for interviewing our students and deciding if they wish to proceed. We do not solicit placements for our students; requests must come from the schools. On the other hand, sometimes our students create opportunities for themselves. They ask things like, "If I can find a district that needs a bilingual special education teacher with experience in art therapy, can I have an internship?" We certainly don't discourage our students from marketing themselves; we think it is a valuable skill to develop.

This does not mean we are abdicating our responsibility for maintaining quality programs. The district tells us what it wants, and we tell them, in turn, what we need. We negotiate with an eye on what's in our interests. We need, first, an assurance that our integrity will be not be compromised in terms of the quality of experience our student will receive. This includes specification of the placement situation, the support available, and the supervision offered by the district. If we are confident the student can enter the internship with a high

probability of success, we will proceed. Otherwise, we will not allow it. All decisions are situationally specific; a student who might do well in some situations would be overwhelmed in others. We take the responsibility for determining what is appropriate.

The key to this program is flexibility in those matters where flexibility is possible. We enter negotiations with the districts with confidence in our students and in district personnel as fellow professionals. I have tried briefly to indicate some of the variance that can arise with our internships. Some of the factors we discuss with districts are the following:

1. What is the exact teaching situation in which the intern will be placed? Will the load be appropriate for an entering professional? Will there be release time for observation of master teachers?

2. Will mentor teachers be available to the intern? If so, is there a need for training sessions for mentor teachers or other support personnel?

3. What kind of orientation will be provided to the intern? Will it cover curricular and pedagogical issues as well as regulations and employment conditions?

4. How will observations of the intern be conducted? Will audio and videotaping be available? How often will conferences with observers be scheduled?

5. Does the district provide ongoing training seminars for beginning teachers? Would these be available for the intern?

6. What are the terms of the contract? Is it appropriate for the teaching situation? When is it expected that the intern would move to regular status with the district?

We are looking for a cluster of factors that will allow us to proceed, and that is, I think, important: we *want* to do this. We have asked ourselves, "If this is win-win negotiating, who wins from this program?" We think the answer is: the state wins because it has high-quality people entering the profession as fully-certified teachers; the school wins because it solves an existing personnel problem and gives itself an opportunity to develop a long-term relationship with a good teacher; the student wins because he or she has a chance to enter teaching in a professional manner. And of course the university wins because it's helping the other partners in the enterprise achieve their goals.

Regarding the last point, a personnel director from a Texas district asked me this summer, "Are you sure you work for a university? This just seems too flexible to be true. I don't know of anyone else doing anything like this." Although I appreciated the acknowledgement of our uniqueness, I hope other universities will consider making this model for internships less unusual. It seems to me to be especially appropriate for small programs in which the capabilities ofthe students are fairly well known by university faculty. It seems appropriate foruniversities which think an emphasis on cooperation and on trust are important enough to model in their own programs. This kind of internship program seems an appropriate way to help administrators deal with their need to find teachers for special populations such as special education students and

linguistically different students that are assuming more prominence in their schools. And, finally, whether or not there is an emerging shortage of new teachers in general, there has always been a shortage of excellent teachers. At Highlands University we see this model as a way to help better prepare new teachers and to ensure that they will enter and succeed in the profession.

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